

Sunday February 9th 2020
The Word of God
A Survey of the Bible – Lesson 18E
'I Know Your Works....'

1). Re 2:1 *"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, "These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 "I know your works, your labor, your patience [patient endurance], and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience [patient endurance], and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.*

We had seen last time in v2-3 of Revelation Chapter 2, the commendation the Lord gave to those in Ephesus concerning their works emanating from their faith, works they had performed at the start of this dispensation in response to having heard the Word of the Kingdom.

a). And the works we see in these verses are not confined to that timeframe only but are works that must be common to all Christians, even us, who continue to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness with a view to being found worthy at the Judgment Seat.

b). And it is interesting to note that within the context of the judgment of all Christians beginning with this, the first of the 7 churches appearing at Christ's Judgment Seat, there is a major focus on patient endurance and resisting that which is false.

c). Patient endurance as we know, is of paramount importance in our race of the faith and is shown to be so for a specific purpose in the Book of James – Jas 1:2 *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience [patient endurance]. 4 But let patience [patient endurance] have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

This exact same teaching is also found through Paul in –

Ro 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance [patient endurance]; 4 and perseverance [patient endurance], character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

And Paul commends the church of the Thessalonians for possessing it –
1 Th 1:2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, 3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, 4 knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.

Patient endurance then, within the life of the Christian in pursuit of the Kingdom is central to the saving of the soul.

d). And alongside this, which would also be part of patiently enduring, is resisting that which is false, false teaching and those who peddle it, because this is also central to the salvation of the soul, and again for very obvious reasons – *2 Co 11:2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. 4 For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!*

Ga 1:6 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

And in the verses from 2 Corinthians Paul made a connection between receiving a 'different gospel' and false apostles – 2 Co 11:13 *For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.*

The false teaching came from the false apostles, the 'tares' from the Matthew 13 parables and the false teachers of 2 Peter – 2 Pe 2:1 *But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. 3 By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words;*

And the apostates from Jude – Jud 1:4 *For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.*

These 'false teachers' and their 'destructive heresies' find a direct connection with the deception of Eve in the Garden. And the consequences of that deception are well known to us.

e). And as we have already seen, it is the testing of those who said they were apostles but were in fact liars that the Ephesian church was commended for at the Judgment Seat.

f). In conjunction with this the Ephesians also received the commendation – *that you cannot bear those who are evil.* If we compare this with what Paul wrote to Timothy, we can make a further connection- 2 Ti 3:13 *But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

As we have seen, deception is the means that our enemy has employed from the beginning to disqualify those who have been created for rulership. And it is evident from that said to the church of Ephesus that this attack upon Christians began very early on in its history, just as it did when the Woman was created for Adam, and this deception will encompass 2 central tenets, 'has God indeed said?' and 'you surely shall not die.' And this deception will come not only through a corrupted 'gospel' in and of itself, but also in conjunction with it, according to the Matthew 13 parables, through the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, to which we can add from Luke's account of the parables, the pleasures of this life.

g). The safeguard for us in this is exactly the same as that which Paul told Timothy, 'you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of'. Or to say this another way – Heb 2:1 *Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.*

2 Co 2:11 *lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.*

Deception then is no small matter and by its very nature it is subversive, can become all pervasive and has age lasting ramifications. And this is just what had happened early on in the dispensation witnessed through the Ephesians having been deceived into leaving their first love through false teaching, just as Paul had warned their elders at Miletus.

h). But, let's be clear that deception did not just find a home among Christians at the beginning of the dispensation, but has been rampant within the ranks of the eternally saved ever since – 2 Ti 3:1 *But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!*

And this is clearly taught throughout the Scriptures and had been prophesied by the Lord through the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven in Matthew Chapter 13, with the results seen in the 7th of the 7 churches, that of Laodicea. – Re 3:17 *Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—*

2). Re 2:6 *But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

The 'Nicolaitans' and deception will also go hand in hand.

a). We had noted last time that the deeds of the Nicolaitans had been 'hated' at the beginning of the dispensation, as seen through the Ephesians, but had then become established within the ranks of the eternally saved as seen through the church of Pergamos – Re 2:15 *Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.*

Quite simply, the deeds of the Nicolaitans would be the practice of their doctrine – that which they taught set in action. So, who were these Nicolaitans and what did they teach that the Lord saw fit, and will see fit, to draw attention to twice in His judgment of Christians? Both times stating that He hated their deeds and their doctrine.

a). Well, there is no historical record of any group of individuals called the 'Nicolaitans'. The only place they are found are in the verses we have looked at in the Revelation. Nowhere else.

b). There have been attempts over the years to align this group with certain historical individuals whose name could be transferred to their followers, but this falls into the category of manufacturing an explanation rather than being an explanation.

c). By far the safest route to go with this is to let the name itself explain what the Lord wants us to know.

d). The word is a transliterated, compound word, from the Greek word 'nikolaites', which is derived from 'nike' = a victor, a conqueror, and 'laos' = the people. So, if we allow the word to explain itself it simply means to be 'victorious over the people', 'to conquer the people.'

e). What we would see in the practice of the ‘Nicolaitans’ then, the result of what they taught, are individuals, leaders in the church, who chose to subjugate those in their care to their self-imposed authority. The creation of a priestly class, ‘the clergy’ over the people, ‘the laity’.

f). And this as we have seen twice, God hates.

g). Now, it may not be surprising that the doctrine of the Nicolaitans is both found and accepted within the church of Pergamos as the name for this church derives from the Greek word ‘gamos’ = marriage. It is possible then, that this church might take us to the period of church history beginning with Constantine the Great, when the world and the church became ‘one flesh’. A marriage that continues to this day.

h). Consequently, the worldly structure of kings and emperors in supreme authority over those whom they ruled found an easy transference into the church, giving rise to the whole notion of a hierarchy of clergy in dominion over the laity.

i). This of course is completely contrary to the teaching of Scripture, and if we should be harboring any lingering thoughts along these lines, let’s change our minds at once.

3). Mt 20:20 *Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him.21 And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom."..... 24 And when the ten heard it, they were greatly displeased with the two brothers. 25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. 26 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. 27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

Christ Himself is our example and what He said to the 12 is the only model for church governance. Authority within the church must always be based upon ‘service’ and absolutely nothing else – 1 Co 16:15 *I urge you, brethren—you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the*

*firstfruits of Achaia, and that **they have devoted themselves** to the ministry [service] of the saints— 16 that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us. [15 Now, I exhort you, brethren, you know the household of Stephanas, that it is a firstfruit of Achaia, and that they took upon themselves the responsibility of a ministering service to the saints, that you yourselves also 16 put yourselves under the leadership of such as these and everyone who works with us and labors to the point of exhaustion. Wuest]*

Php 2:17 Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.

Col 4:12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.

To minister is to serve and that service is to one end, ‘that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God’. In other words, the salvation of the souls of those who are being served – 1 Pe 2:25 *For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

1 Pe 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers [the Lord being the example], not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

There is then only one focus for church leadership, and it is this focus that accounts for the authority entrusted to them in the church. We have seen it in 1 Corinthians 16:16 talking of the household of Stephanas *that **you also submit** to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us.*

Those in the church that met at Stephanas's house were told to submit themselves to those such as Stephanas, why? Because his household devoted themselves to the service of the saints.

a). And we have seen this very same thing only recently in the Book of Hebrews – Heb 13:17 *Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*

Authority within the church is established then when those being served submit themselves to those 'who rule over you'. And this submission is based on one thing, the very thing that is the focus for church leadership, 'they watch out for your souls'. Christ again provides the example in 1 Peter 2:25 where He is described as, *the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

The world's view of authority cannot and must not have any place among the eternally saved. If it does, then those who practice the same could be classified as 'Nicolaitans'. Authority is not by right because of position but is given because of the nature of the service of those to whom authority is to be entrusted as they minister towards the salvation of the soul of those in their care. It is never to be forced upon anyone.

b). But for authority to exist this way in practice it is imperative that the word of the Kingdom/the gospel of the glory of Christ is taught correctly in the first place otherwise there can only be chaos and shipwreck and a heavy hand to maintain 'authority' on a counterfeit premise.

b). Perhaps understanding these things will help us better understand what the Lord says to those who are overseers in 1 Peter Chapter 5, *nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock*

And to understand what the Lord said through Paul to Timothy in – 2 Ti 2:24 *And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, 25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may*

know the truth, 26 and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

And to understand what is said in Titus – Tit 1:7 For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, 8 but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, 9 holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

Given then that the Lord has said that He ‘hates’ the deeds and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and that this was and therefore will be a major issue at the Judgment Seat, it is really important that our understanding and our thinking with respect to this is in line with Scripture, because this is one of the ways we can overcome the world, as we refuse to allow the world’s concept of authority to darken our doors.

c). Remembering of course the outcome of our faith if we do so – Re 2:7 *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” ’*

For those who overcome the world, the flesh and the devil, through their patient endurance, the promises they will receive in that Day begin here with the first promise, that of being given the right to eat from ‘the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.’

d). This is a promise, as are the other 6, inextricably connected to rulership with Christ in the Millennial Kingdom, when the authority exercised in that Day will look very different from the authority to be presently seen in the church, and will be antithetical to the way the world presently operates – Re 2:26 *And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—27 ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—as I also have received from My Father; 28 and I will give him the morning star. 29 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

The 'tree of life' then is presently seen located in the heavens, in the 'Garden' of God. This same tree though has its origin in another Garden in another location – Ge 2:8 *The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. 9 And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*

And if we allow the tree of life to be seen within its correct Scriptural context, we will understand the enormous significance of being able to eat its fruit and why it forms the first of the overcomers promises.

But this will have to wait until next time though – If the Lord is willing.